

A 21st Century Manifesto for Liberty

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Chapter 1

Bringing the branches of liberty back together

What does liberal mean? There can be no agreement, it seems. To some, especially in the US, it is synonymous with progressive and the left. In fact, some conservatives have come to believe that liberalism is merely a moderate form of socialism, synonymous with big government. In contrast, the Liberal Party of Australia is generally regarded as a centre-right party, and is said to have liberal and conservative elements, united by their opposition to unions and big government. Meanwhile, the libertarians sometimes like to say that they are the real liberals, because they are the only ones who are absolutely for small government, under all circumstances. So who is a liberal? In a sense, a liberal can be a person with beliefs similar to Bernie Sanders, Tony Abbott or Ron Paul. But that would be self-contradictory!

It all goes back to a historical split in liberalism, actually. Once upon a time, liberalism was

clearly small government orientated, the so-called classical liberalism that libertarianism embodies today. In those days, aristocratic and socially conservative government was the main 'enemy of liberty', and cutting government down to size was the one true path to liberty. However, as society evolved, some people observed that small government was no longer guarantee of individual liberty. For example, the old British Liberal Party began embracing workers' rights and social welfare to some extent, and had become quite interventionist by the time of Keynes, who was the famous member of that party who argued for government intervention in the economy. It was all in the name of preventing relatively powerless everyday people from being exploited by powerful economic interests. After all, there is not much liberty in being forced to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week just to have enough to survive. Hence a split developed within liberalism, where some liberals believed it was important for government to put a safety

net in place to guarantee the personal liberty of everyone, and other liberals stuck steadfastly to the 'small government' doctrine, accepting whatever social consequence that followed.

Since most democracies functioned on a two-party system, alliances had to be chosen. Once liberalism had split, instead of choosing each other, welfare liberals chose to side with socialists and social democrats, and small government liberals, now often called libertarians, chose to side with conservatives. Hence we have 'liberal' in the sense of the US Democrats, and 'liberal' in the sense of the Australian Liberals. But still, liberalism is not socialism or conservatism, no matter how it is implemented. Therefore, most people would see that Hillary Clinton is a liberal whilst Bernie Sanders is a socialist in a party with liberals, and that Malcolm Turnbull is a liberal whilst Tony Abbott is a conservative in a party with liberals. Since liberalism has its limits, it must mean

something. There must be something in common between Clinton and Turnbull that Sanders and Abbott simply don't share, even though they are technically on opposite sides of the political spectrum. (And I am not saying that I don't like Sanders, or don't agree with Sanders or Abbott sometimes, it's just that they are not liberals.)

If liberals, left-liberals and right-liberals alike, share something in common, it's the fundamental belief in liberty. Liberalism is unlike any other ideology, in that it does not seek to use government to social engineer a certain type of society. Right-liberals or libertarians simply don't believe in government intervention, and if left-liberals believe in government intervention, it's for the sake of liberty. Liberals can be personally conservative, progressive or radical, but they do not use the government to engineer a conservative, progressive or radical society. Those who do are

simply not liberals. Take same-sex marriage for example. Liberals who personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman would nevertheless not use government power to prevent or frustrate same-sex marriages, and liberals who strongly believe in marriage equality would nevertheless refrain from using government power to force the rest of society to act consistently with their beliefs. Those on either side of these limits, e.g. those who believe marriage licences should not be available to same-sex couples as a matter of law, and those who believe businesses should face fines for refusing to participate in same-sex weddings, cannot really be called liberal.

It's high time the true meaning of liberalism as a core belief is recognised again, even though its various implementations may mean liberals often take opposite sides in politics. Even though liberals are now divided across the partisan spectrum, they should work within

their respective parties to ensure the most liberal outcomes. If that can happen, we will certainly have a high degree of liberalism in society, and hence a much more adaptive society, no matter which party is in government.

Chapter 2

A solution to the 'split in liberalism'

Let's face it. The 'split in liberalism' is here to stay. Ideals of absolute small government cannot be reconciled with ideals of a welfare safety net and workers' rights, even if both stem from a belief in liberty and nothing else. And left-liberals will necessarily align with social democrats and right-liberals and libertarians with conservatives in two-party systems, since their economic beliefs dictate such alliances.

Whilst the split remains in place, however, a common commitment to liberty should be recognised amongst all branches of liberalism. For example, I am a believer in welfare liberalism, but I still respect that small government liberals mean well for liberty. Unlike my socialist friends, I don't label them as 'selfish rich people' or something like that. Of course, the same respect does not extend to right wing big government conservatives, who I vehemently disagree with. I also believe that liberals from both sides can inspire each other,

and 'pull' each other back to our liberal roots. For example, whilst I don't agree with the libertarian ideas of abolishing public schools and the welfare state, libertarians and libertarianism remain a major inspiration to me. They certainly provide me with all the arguments I need to refute my socialist friends when they say that the government should fine companies with too few female board members, for example. Right-liberals can keep left-liberals away from embracing the social engineering tendencies of socialism, and left-liberals can keep right-liberals away from embracing the conservative excuse that certain social issues, e.g. civil rights and civil liberties, are 'second order issues' not worth discussing.

The disagreement regarding economic issues remain. However, liberals have a fundamental belief in democracy, as long as it is for solving collective issues, rather than for tyranny of the majority against minorities. Therefore, we can

and should agree to respect whatever the democratic mandate demands regarding economic policies, whilst we can also go our separate ways to argue for what we believe in, and campaign for our side during election campaigns, for example. This is also consistent with our long standing belief that there shall be no 'taxation without representation'.

In the next section I shall make some arguments about my support for a certain brand of liberalism.

Chapter 3

Ideals of liberty must be practical

The liberal cause, i.e. to reduce government intervention in every area of life and to give people more flexibility and 'freedom to do the right thing', is a very noble cause. However, I believe that it must be achieved gradually, perhaps over decades. Let me explain.

Firstly, whilst libertarian policies as we commonly understand them are ultimately what we should strive for, in some cases their immediate implementation would cause some people to lose freedom. For example, the withdrawal of anti-discrimination laws would mean ethnic minorities and LGBT people have less freedom to access opportunities in life, the withdrawal of government welfare would mean those living in poverty have less freedom to negotiate their working conditions, and the complete and immediate withdrawal of gun control may mean those who cannot afford to buy a gun or learn to use one feel unsafe and therefore effectively lose their freedom of

movement. Whilst all these policies may eventually be able to be implemented in a society that is mature enough for them, in the 2010s we are simply not there yet.

Let me take this from another angle. Whilst those of us familiar with libertarianism find libertarian policies logical, whether we agree with their (immediate) implementation or not, the wider world really doesn't understand them at all. The Libertarian Party may be the third largest party in the USA, but stereotypes about libertarians being conspiracy theorists or even anti-social remain strong in some circles. In Australia, where a senator representing a libertarian party was elected recently (something US libertarians can probably only dream of right now), many people across the political spectrum, from the environmentalist left to the religious right, still appear to completely misunderstand the new senator's positions on various matters. All this just shows

that libertarianism continues to have a communication problem worldwide, and many non-libertarians continue to view it as, to put it mildly, eccentric.

In a society that measures policies and ideologies by their results more than anything else, liberalism cannot exist in a bubble. It must generate acceptable results regarding its stated goal: to maximize freedom for everyone. And if it is to do so, then libertarian policies must be rolled out gradually, and only when they do increase freedom in the current society. If we can consistently stick to this plan, libertarianism will become better understood by society, and will be seen as practical and the right thing to do.

Chapter 4

Further Notes on Liberty

This chapter contains an assortment of ideas that is based around the core idea of liberty. Some ideas may appeal to liberals generally, and others may appeal to left- or right- leaning liberals more, but they are all a thought provoking exercise aiming to explore the scope of liberalism and its implementation, and the commonalities between liberals on both sides.

I may not agree with your lifestyle, but I will fight for your right to Live It

I may not agree with your lifestyle, but I will fight for your right to live it. That is because I am a proponent of freedom. It is a natural, modern day extension of the idea that 'I may not agree with what you say, but I will fight for your right to say it'.

I am a proponent of freedom because I believe that none of us mere human beings can know the whole truth of the world. We are bound to make mistakes one way or another, serious mistakes, if we force our beliefs onto others in any way. It is time we move past doing that, and we must do that consistently.

Therefore, we must make as little interference into others' personal lives as possible as a

society. But not just that. We must have an economic safety net for people to live a reasonably decent life with reasonable amount of choices they can make (some may not recognise it, but freedom and socialism do go hand and hand to some extent). We must have a set of antidiscrimination laws for people to take off the pressure of non-conformity.

We all know that the limits of freedom lie in that crimes that victimise others should not be allowed, and your freedom is no excuse to intrude into others' freedom.

But how about more controversial things - like do people have a right to choose to get drunk and consume mind-altering drugs? Their right to do so must be balanced by others' right not to be victimised by those not in control of their actions.

The Morality of Taxes: A Discussion

Some libertarians believe that government taxation is anti-freedom and the equivalent of robbery. I happen to not believe in this entirely, and I have my own reasons.

In a market economy, anybody who earns a decent income is earning it from society, by rendering their services to society. If a healthy society does not exist, they will quickly lose their market. For example, in a civil war affected country most industries go out of business.

In a state where the government does not invest in infrastructure, the potential for businesses to grow is limited. Therefore, requiring those who have benefited from a well run society to pay back to that society from what they have earned is just, as long as it is not

at an unreasonable level (like taking 98% of your income).

To highlight the fact that taxes are a fair exchange of benefit, I would like to further advocate that the government provide an option where a citizen can opt out of taxes, but will not be able to use any government-sponsored service like most of the infrastructure that has been set up in society. I guess very few will select that option.

Now, you may argue that whilst taxation that goes to infrastructure, security and defence may be fair, taxation that goes to welfare for the poor is not.

However, I should point out that giving everybody a living wage and adequate healthcare is the cornerstone of supporting a healthy society. A society that has a big

underclass will soon evolve into a society with civil unrest. Likewise, a more educated and informed populace is more receptive to different personal and interpersonal needs, and will provide a good market for many types of services. You really cannot say that profit making businesses do not benefit from this work that the government is doing. This work is not socialism, it is just part of providing a good infrastructure and human capital that benefits everyone, businesses included.

I do, however, believe that some forms of taxation is not fair. The inheritance tax, for example, has no ethical basis. The wishes of the passed person to pass their wealth onto anybody else is entirely their own decision, and it is a disrespect of the dead to tax what they have left behind.

Separation of Church and State is Rule No 1

Separation of church and state exists for a reason - otherwise each church will compete for a portion of the state and use it to disadvantage those who don't agree with it. Religion will then resemble politics at its worst - power struggles, majority oppressing the minority. The wall must be maintained at all cost - for the sake of religion.

I suggest that those of us who seek to maintain this separation follow this rule: refuse to deal with arguments that stem from purely religious dogma without suitable reasoning.

This does not mean that we are not engaging religious people. I am a religious person myself. The idea is that we are open to all reasonable people who wish to talk, just not people who

will fight for their dogma by force rather than persuasion.

Freedom Above All Else!

The number one thing we should be aiming for and defending in a democracy is freedom. No freedom, no democracy, fascism etc. can rise up easily.

Forget about electing an efficient government, if the choice is between freedom and lack thereof. This includes not just economic freedom but also the freedom to believe and live as you believe. We must stand up for that freedom, at any cost.

There are many lifestyles out there that I don't agree with. But then, when it comes to governance, freedom comes first, and I stand by others' rights to live as they believe without difficulty.

United in Liberty

United we stand, divided we fall. As in all things, we need to be united in supporting each others' decisions to live out our lifestyle beliefs freely, or otherwise we will all lose that freedom.

Keep in mind that there are a lot of forces out there that seek to take away that freedom. Wingnuts who think that every community in the world should be made in the image of their own, for example. Religious fundamentalists who believe they have the right to shove their beliefs down our throats.

However, when we, the diverse people and communities who share one common thing - believe in freedom - stand together, they have no way denting our freedom. We will not have to fear them.

The New Principles of 'Small Government'

Traditionally, small government has been achieved with cost cuts, cutting programs to provide welfare to the needy, and being against basic health insurance for all. Yet these measures can be harmful to many people and hence the fabric of society itself.

I suggest a few other ways that small government can be brought about without using the above means:

-employing people who are already receiving welfare as much as possible. This will decrease the need for welfare naturally, without needing to resort to providing below-liveable incomes for those on welfare. This is also good for private enterprise as it frees up more talent for the private sector to use. Since employing those

on welfare is also usually cheaper, this can result in natural cost savings for the government.

-taking care of everybody's life so that every citizen is on a living income. From there, we can free up the market as much as possible without needing to worry about tearing the fabric of society apart. Cutting tariffs to zero, ending all agricultural subsidies, and allowing the natural fading out of unsustainable industries in favour of imports should all be relatively easy by then.

-encourage multiculturalism, with the government a protector of peace and freedom amongst all members of society rather than an agent in culture itself. The government then will be by default powerless to control culture.

A New Approach to Government Employment

The government should try to employ every single unemployed person in the nation. This is what I believe.

This is not as hard to do as it seems. In most advanced countries the government already has a welfare system to look after the unemployed. The government can pay the welfare benefits as a wage and ask for work for them in return. This is important because while it is natural for private employers to look for what they see most fit to help them profit, it is the government's role in society to correct market failure, including to help those that private enterprise do not find useful.

This will also free up more talent for the private sector to choose from, which is also good for free enterprise.

Conservatism Failed Because It Is False Advertising

Conservatism says it is for freedom. They love to say how conservatism is based on libertarianism. Well, that seems quite like my approach - all the things I support are geared towards providing more freedom for people. Except that we actually are not fellow travellers politically. Why? Because conservatism, at least in its early 21st century incarnation, does not stand for freedom - not anymore. Not when it stand against freedom of religion, as in the denial of churches and religious organisations to marry same-sex couples in accordance with their doctrine.

I am told that I do share a few causes with the conservatives, time and time again. However, I would not trust that they would do anything for me in that area either. Why? Just look at their

track record. Conservatism fought drugs, and drugs won. Conservatism fought divorce, and divorce won. Conservatism fought abortion, and abortion won. Conservatism fought crime, and crime won. Conservatism fought casual sex, and casual sex won.

Family Rights is Good Policy for All

Let's talk about an important issue: supporting families' rights to keep themselves intact and away from those who may harm them even out of good intentions.

The issue of legislating to prevent governments from abusing power and taking children away from families that they merely don't approve of (rather than as a last resort to prevent physical harm) is often seen as a side issue. However, it should be an issue everybody should be concerned about.

Many otherwise idealistic progressives feel that there is nothing wrong with the current powers government have over families. However, in more conservative jurisdictions (where they don't live anyway) parenting rights have been

taken away because of sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination, for example. Therefore, there is a very progressive stake in protecting family rights as much as we can. Therefore, making the government give back parenting rights to families is something which everyone, no matter their political views, should embrace.

The Real Revolution for Freedom

For many people in the West, the revolution began some time in the 1960s. Not the industrial revolution, democracy revolution, capitalist or socialist revolution, but the big one - the revolution for freedom. The radical idea that people should be able to determine their destiny, that historically held social roles and prejudices were restricting and should be done away with, finally started to become reality.

But we need to work hard still, for this revolution still has a long way to go, at least in some areas. Too many people have dwelled on the by-products of the revolution - that nobody can judge your sex life or personal substance use, to remember that the revolution has an important purpose - freedom for each individual ultimately to do the right thing by themselves.

What we need to work on is to work hard to knock down traditional cultural stereotypes. Enforced gender roles, racism and homophobia, that all has to go. True freedom is achieved when you are really free to be anything you want to be (as long as you are not harming anybody) - and that condition can only arrive when enforced roles, views and disadvantages are removed. It really is a radical idea - just like democracy once was.

Lowering the Voting Age

I am all for lowering the voting age from 18 to 16. This has been my position consistently, from when I was below 16, right up until now, and I cannot see any reason for me to change it.

Frankly, I don't see why 16 year olds should not be able to vote. 16 year olds are often political (I was), and are mature enough to cast a vote for the future of the nation. In fact, increasing the pool of young voters by doing this will certainly shift the political focus more towards the future, as young people are more likely to care about the future and accept the new ideas like tolerance and equality. This will become especially important as the population ages through time due to shrinking birth rates (something that I find sad personally and therefore recommend that every couple have at least 3 children if they can, but something that we must face up to for now).

Ending Economic Tyranny

US President Barack Obama has said that he wants to create a "post-bubble" model for solid economic growth once the current economic recession ends.

I think this is very good news, as the 'bubble' version of the economy has hurt far too many people. Whilst it may be argued that investors take their risk in doing their investment and that economic downturns are just an expected feature of the game, who can say that everyday people who have nothing to do with the investment process also deserve to get hurt in the process? Most everyday people don't even understand the economic cycle, having them to carry the burden of the bubble collapses is like a tyrant putting his subjects in jail for no crime, isn't it? It's about time the system changed.

Free Market Principles Applied in Cultural Matters

It is a well settled fact that the government should not be heavily intervening in the free market economy. This is a point now accepted by left and right alike. Whilst the left may have a different view of fairness than the right, both agree that we should not have sky high tariffs, that we generally would not have government monopolies in most industries, and that intervention is only justified when they serve a clear purpose of preserving a free and fair playing field. Both sides agree that businesses in the market economy should be able to trade and innovate freely in general. Both sides agree that intrusive governmental intervention is clumsy and anti-freedom, is anti progress, and benefits nobody.

I believe the same standard should apply to cultural matters. Some regulation is required to maintain a free and fair playing field for everyone. For example, we need to have law and order, and some (including myself) would argue that we also need antidiscrimination laws and gun control. But all those things are based on a clear need to protect a free and fair playing field, and do not otherwise stifle innovation. Here, both left and right should reject heavy handed, intrusive regulation – like banning certain lifestyle choices, or banning gay adoption, for example, no matter how they feel about the subject personally, unless there is a clear consensus on the need for it, backed up by clear evidence, and in the service of freedom and fairness. Of course, I also believe unwarranted government monopolies, for example in the area of marriage, should also be abolished.

It is possible and desirable to have the same set of principles, based on freedom, for both the social and economic spheres. It is time we start thinking this way.

A New Liberal Consensus

What does the word 'liberal' mean nowadays? It's a question worth asking. In North America, there has long been a distortion of the word to just mean big government and leftism, whilst in Australia, it is the name of what has become the major conservative party, a party that does not even support the freedom to marry for gay couples. Neither definition seems very 'liberal' to me.

In fact, the word 'liberal' has an inherent meaning, much like conservative or socialist. It means to support freedom. Of course, how this freedom is interpreted differs amongst individuals, but surely it doesn't mean taxation without representation or opposing the freedom to marry. We need to reclaim this word by strengthening awareness about what liberalism is (and what it is not).

All liberals should support freedom above any other ideology. A liberal may be conservative, progressive, pro-business, pro-environment, religious or atheist, or everything in between, but they must respect liberty above all else. Whilst they may have their own beliefs, they must not force it onto others. In politics, liberty must be their main game, and in upholding this liberty, they must not use the power of the state to force their beliefs onto others. For example, a liberal is free to not approve of same-sex marriages personally, but should still vote for the freedom to marry. On the other hand, a liberal may be personally angry about climate sceptics not supporting more climate action, but has to fully understand that the mutual respect of each individual's personal conscience and the upholding of the principle of governments only levying taxes when there is a mandate to do so are too important to sacrifice in any case, and therefore will not use the

climate emergency to justify distorting these principles.

Liberals may otherwise still have disagreements on policy and ideology. For example, some liberals believe that lower taxation and freer markets are always the key to freedom, whilst others believe that freedom would only equally be available to the poor and disadvantaged if a strong welfare safety net is available. Some liberals believe in gun control, citing that it is a right for citizens to be able to roam the streets without fear, whilst others believe that the right to bear arms is more important. Either way, these are all valid disagreements for liberals to have, because they are all about how freedom is to be maintained. Therefore, liberalism should be a broad church. I believe the consensus should be that everyone who truly believes in liberty for all should be allowed in, even though this welcome should not extend to encompass those who seek to take away others'

liberty for any other ideological agenda
(whether it is religious values,
environmentalism, upholding tradition, or
feminism).

Am I A Feminist?

After some of my recent posts, some people have asked me this question: are you a feminist?

I usually don't like labels. However, to answer this question, I think I'll have to use some. You see, there are two main types of feminism: liberal feminism and radical feminism. As with all things liberal vs radical, I support all of liberal feminism but none of radical feminism.

Liberal feminism, as with all things liberal, is about removing inequalities that are clearly identified in the system, for example unequal education opportunities for women or unequal pay for women for the same job. These inequalities are objective, and are clearly unfair. Fortunately, the work of liberal feminism is over

in the West, but we always have to keep the cause up for the sake of women living outside the West.

Radical feminism, on the other hand, is all about a perceived structure to society that disfavours women and must be changed, even when there are no clearly identified inequalities. In radical feminism, people and society are analysed by looking at who has more 'privilege'. Trouble is, this is highly subjective. Thus radical feminism is a subjective ideology. I personally have a particular problem with subjective ideologies - that thing called 'conservatism' that I ran away from was just such an ideology. Conservatism is always able to justify itself, even without looking at objective results, which is often the misery of other people. Radical feminism, for me, carries the same worries. Therefore, it is something I just cannot support.

I'm sure radical feminists are well intentioned.
But so are conservatives. And it doesn't mean
they aren't wrong. Social engineering, especially
when working with anything other than
objective evidence, is dangerous.

Revisiting Citizen Initiated Referenda

Citizen initiated referenda to enable people to make laws or even alter the constitution even when the government would not act. They are often supported by libertarians. A group would have to first gather enough signatures, upon which they can demand a referendum.

I myself have had reservations about them due to civil rights concerns. For example, people can and probably will demand a referendum for capital punishment in many European countries, Canada and the US states without capital punishment, and their odds of winning it are almost 100% in many cases. In libertarian thought, rights should trump even democratic mandate, as is necessary to prevent tyranny of the majority.

However, a system without citizen initiated referenda can actually be bad for civil rights. Recently I had a look at a map of global acceptability of gay relationships, and it appears that whilst the likes of the UK and France are moving towards marriage equality, at least 3 countries with a lower level of homophobia (Germany, Finland and Australia) still do not have marriage equality. The parliament in these countries appear to be made up of people more conservative than the general public on this issue. The situation seems to be the most ridiculous in Germany, with 89% support for gay relationships, yet the government only recently treated them equally in the financial sense. If Germany, Finland or Australia had citizen initiated referenda marriage equality would almost certainly be law in these countries.

I propose a solution - that Citizen initiated referenda only be allowed when they are consistent with human rights. That means that

every petition for referendum must be submitted to the court for ruling, and a referendum will only be granted when ruled by a court to be compatible with civil rights. I think this strikes a balance, and will provide the best outcome for civil rights in any situation.

Marriage Privatization Just a Name Change? It's Much More!

Marriage privatization, as a term, simply means that there should be no references to the word 'marriage' in law. There have been many approaches suggested, but I would suggest going for the most conservative method: changing 'marriage' to 'civil union' in law, and perhaps also reforming the law to give equal rights to non-registered cohabiting couples as is already the case in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

This approach has been criticised for just swapping one term for another. But it's a matter of perspective. Marriage will always be a popular cultural institution, and civil unions will always be only a legal institution rather than a cultural one, I believe. After all, you don't say 'please civil union me' or 'we are civilly united',

as marriage equality activists have pointed out. Therefore, the terminology change causes the government regulation to become more separated from the cultural and historical institution.

In my model, marriage will be the institution people enter into to create families, and will be maintained by the couple and their surrounding community. Civil unions will be the legal contract governments administer, as a tool to help marriages. Governments now control something that can assist marriages rather than the marriage itself here, a very important difference.

This change can have a profound effect on things. For example, we can have a simple and non-bitter process for ending the civil union, but culturally we can still view that marriage shouldn't end unless there is significant

problems. The divorce rate wouldn't have skyrocketed after the no-fault reforms if this approach had been taken, I believe.

Or take the marriage equality thing. Rather than having a politics heavy campaign that feels top-down that 'redefines marriage' in our opponents' eyes, it would have been a cultural change that started from everyday life. The acceptance of these unions as a part of normal everyday life will finally demanded the government's equal treatment through provision of equal civil union rights. And we may have had it done long ago if we could go that route instead.

Answering Critics of Marriage Privatization

1. Marriage Privatization May Affect Marriage Culture

Some people have raised concerns that marriage privatization may affect marriage culture. But just how that effect will be is still debated. Some contend that marriage culture will be weakened. However, there is no evidence nor any inherent logic that the non-use of the 'marriage' word and its replacement with 'civil unions' will weaken marriage culture in any way, since 'marriage' will be around in our culture for at least centuries to come either way. Conversely, many people also say that marriage privatization will strengthen marriage culture. When couples can set their own terms for their own marriage, it is logical that there will be more ownership of marriage in our culture, and therefore there will be a stronger marriage culture. There is a third option too -

that marriage privatization would not change marriage culture in any way. As culture is not really reliant on government, except in the fantasies of authoritarian types, this is not unlikely too.

There is another aspect to this argument too. When marriage is in the hands of the government, they have an increased power to mould it any way they like. All the conservatives who don't believe in marriage privatization will regret it if one day the government allows polyamorous marriages. I believe that one of the reasons some of them are so paranoid about marriage equality, to the point of inventing a slippery slope argument, is because they are just too aware that whenever government favours one definition of marriage over another, they can further change the definition at any time. But this has nothing to do with marriage equality itself - it's just the natural consequence of letting government

control marriage. When marriage returns to the collective hands of the public, no future government will be able to impose a new definition of marriage on the people without majority support.

In short, whilst there is plenty of debate about what kind of impact, if any, marriage privatization will have on marriage culture, the case for a stronger marriage culture under marriage privatization is at least as strong if not significantly stronger than the case for the opposite. Marriage culture is weak enough as it is, with the 40%+ divorce rates, and many would agree that there needs to be a change. Many believe marriage privatization should be part of that change.

2. Marriage Privatization May Lead To Bigger Government Through Welfare

This is an argument made to convince small government libertarians, but I believe it is just a conservative argument dressed up to appeal to libertarians. Firstly, believing in the result of increased reliance on welfare depends on believing in a weakened marriage culture under marriage privatization, something clearly not agreed by any supporter of marriage privatization that I know. Therefore, this is speculative opinion only. Conservatives often make and support policy on feeling rather than hard evidence, whilst libertarians are more likely to look at evidence. Hence the differences on things like the drug war. Therefore, acting on speculative opinion is essentially conservative and totally unlibertarian.

Plus it is against libertarian principles to use the ends to justify the means. It is a very conservative but not libertarian thing to do. For example, plenty of libertarians, myself included, do believe that legalising marijuana may have

adverse effects on societal productivity and welfare dependence. Yet only conservatives, not libertarians, believe that the status quo of criminalising marijuana should be maintained because of this. The conservative worldview generally supports using anti-liberty means to achieve desired outcomes, whilst the libertarian worldview requires one to support liberty as a principle. Another great example is where conservatives often support wars to 'spread liberty and democracy' but libertarians almost never do, even though they too believe in liberty and democracy.

Therefore, I believe arguments like these are purely conservative and incompatible with libertarian thinking.

3. Marriage Privatization Is Impracticable As A Political Goal

This argument is often put forth by liberals and libertarians who believe that there is nothing we can do about government control of marriage. I have to disagree here. I believe we are not going to achieve the ideal of getting the word marriage replaced by the word civil unions everywhere in law in the next 30 or more years. But that doesn't mean that we cannot have a change in culture and even some changes in law that supports the idea of marriage as a cultural institution defined by the couple and their families and community first and foremost. We need to lay the groundwork and win the cultural argument first.

In the West, marriage has been in the hands of the government for a few centuries. Marriage privatization will take time. It will definitely be a much longer term thing than reforms like marriage equality. But one day its time will come. We just have to be patient.

Democracy is the Collective Expression of Liberty

Critics of liberalism often point out that it is an inadequate philosophy, as it does not deal with 'the commons', for example the environment. This is actually not true, as most liberals actually take democracy to be the collective expression of liberty. For most liberals, whilst democracy is not an excuse for tyranny of the majority, where it is applied to collective matters like environmental policy, it is the legitimately liberal way.

And democracy for collective issues, just like liberty for individual issues, is the adaptive way to do things too. For example, whilst various commercial interests would like to destroy our environment for their own benefit, if a majority of the population supports restricting their ability to do so, the government will have a

mandate to protect our environment against these commercial interests. As to how to build that mandate, I believe an honest and respectful discussion based around truly free consciences would arrive at the most satisfactory answer.

Another example is unnecessary wars. Most people around the world actually opposed the War in Iraq in 2003, the classic recent example of an 'unnecessary war', even though our governments went ahead with it anyway. (I clearly remember a poll showing a majority of Americans, Britons and Australians refusing to support a war that was not approved by the UN.) If our democratic systems were more robust and made sure the likes of Bush, Blair and Howard had to actually listen to their own people's advice, I believe the war would not have happened.

To ensure that our democracies remain robust in the complex modern world, I also believe that we need to revisit the question of direct democracy vs representative democracy. Whilst representative democracy, where we elect our politicians to vote on matters, is an adequate and most practical expression of democracy on most matters, and having public votes on every matter like they did in ancient Greece is impractical, I believe there also needs to be a system of direct democracy, to resolve the most contentious issues in society. Anything less means that politics remains rigid package deals, thus encouraging a culture war dynamic. There are other implications too. For example, after the Iraq War, Bush, Blair and Howard were all returned to power in elections in 2004-5, mostly on the basis of other issues. No wonder they did not have to be 'democratic' regarding the war. My favoured model for reform is having three to five 'propositions' given to the electorate during each election, plus legislation to enable

citizen initiated referenda and plebiscites, but I am open-minded regarding other models too.

Arguing for Liberty from the Family Perspective

I believe it's time for us to start embracing a family-based argument for liberty, as part of our reasons to support liberty.

The autonomy of families is one of the biggest safeguards against tyranny. After all, multiple authoritarian states in European history have acted to break down families and family values, turning family members against each other. The way Nazi Germany treated the families of their socialist opponents was a notable example.

Unfortunately, nowadays many idealistic progressives feel that there is nothing wrong with the current powers governments have over families. However, they probably haven't considered that in more conservative jurisdictions (where they don't live anyway) parenting rights have been taken away because of sexual orientation and gender identity

discrimination, for example. Therefore, making the government give back parenting rights to families is something which everyone, no matter their political views, should embrace.

Whilst what family autonomy is from a social perspective is often quite clear, economic policies can also have an impact on the autonomy of families. Different people have different views on these matters, and I respect that. However, do let me share my view. I believe that free trade is good for the liberty of families, as they can access products and services from more providers, at more affordable prices. On the other hand, I also believe that a robust economic safety net and workers' protections are essential for family autonomy, as parents who are forced to work like slaves naturally have no time to spend with their children, meaning their upbringing will be instead dictated by other social forces, which would be a dream for would-be dictators.